HOW VEDRINES DROPPED SPIES IN HUN LINES

The curtain of secrecy so rigorously maintained during the war hid from the public eye no more glorious, intrepid, or individualistic exploits than those of Vedrines, the illustrious Frenchman who has perished in his attempt to fly from Paris to Rome, which flight was to be the prelude to a trip around the world on his beloved "buss."

My duties in the R. A. F., which took me to Paris, and all over France, as a matter of fact, brought me in contact with Vedrines now and again. From his own lips I learned of the details of some of his daring escapades, but more were related to me by his admiring colleagues.

In no instance was absolute secrecy more essential than it was to hide from the world the arduous tasks that were patriotically undertaken and successfully caried through by this skillful aviator.

Had the Germans suspected the nature of the work being performed by Vedrine's a price would undoubtedly have been placed on his head or capture. But to all intents and purposes the Germans are no longer feared as an enemy, and Vedrines himself is dead, so there can be no harm in lifting the curtain from the deeds that enhanced the hero's reputation during the dark days of the war.

Stranger than Fiction.

The story of his exploits is a splendid exemplification of the proverb that truth is stranger than fiction. The feats Vedrines accomplished tax credibility to the utmost, but the truth of them is unimpeachable.

Vedrines when I talked with him was not disposed to take the view that he was doing anything exceptional. I really believe he would have preferred to have been employed in bringing down Boche "busses," but the authorities knew of no man so peculiarly fitted for the special work they wanted done as Vedrines, and he, like a true son and patriot of France, did what was asked of him.

Even to an Allied officer, at the time I spoke to him, Vedrines was not inclined to be communicative, but I pierced the veil sufficiently deeply to see that the "life," once embarked upon, held a great glamour for him. As a matter of fact, he confessed to me—"It is a great life. The hazards are tremendous, but when they are undertaken for 'La Belle France' I count them as nothing."

Under Cloak of Darkness.

Vedrines' work was to drop and pick up Allied spies behind the German lines. On the fact of it this seems incredible, but that it was done cannot be gainsaid, and no man did more work of this hazardous type than Vedrines.

Of course, these consequential missions were undertaken only under the cloak of night. Do not imagine that Vedrines simply flew over the lines and droped his precious spy by means of a parachute. Not a bit of it. Spies had to be picked up again if the information they had gleaned was to be turned to good account. So Vedrines had to descend in the enemy's lines to pick up his human freight of secret intelligence.

It was perilous work, but Vedrines' cool temperament, courage, and skill as a pilot admirably suited him for the job, and he declared to me on one occasion, "One gets used to taking risks, and ultimately thinks nothing of them."

I am not in a position to say how many spies Vedrines dropped or picked up behind the lines, but they were undoubtedly a numerous company, and what we owe to the information they brought back is incalculable.

Vedrines method was to set off with his spy in the middle of the night. None knew the territory behind the lines better than he, and it soon became an easy matter for him to select a quiet and unfrequented landing place, free from the grey uniform of the Hun.

Almost Captured by the Boche.

When he was convinced that he was over his pre-selected landing spot, to which a night-flying compass and his own sense of direction had guided him, Vedrines would shut off his engine and descend quietly to earth in spirals. His colleague, in the guise of a Boche or a French peasant, would alight, a few words were whispered about their meeting on the same rendezvous a few nights later with a prearranged signal, and Vedrines would be off again, his last words—"Bonne chance" (good luck) being uttered as he commenced to rise again.

"I had one very narrow escape," confessed Vedrines. "I landed in the German lines one night in inky darkness. Our agent had just alighted when we heard the guttural voices of Boches. Quick as lightning I was off again, knowing that my companion could well look after himself. And I am glad to say that everything turned out happily. I returned four nights later to the same rendezvous, and was much relieved to find that my comrade had eluded the Huns, and picked up much useful information during his short speel amongst them. But it was a neat thing for both of us."

The Germans spread wire on open places that could serve as landing places, but the redoubtable Vedrines came down among a herd of cows. "Cows have never yet been seen eating barbed wire," was his rejoinder to a friend who asked how he was going to manage.

During the attack on Quennevieres, he landed on an enemy aerodrome near Tergnier Railway Station, and though his machine was riddled, and he was himself wounded, succeeded in returning with valuable information, which resulted in the capture of over 8000 prisoners by the French on the following day.

Rescuing the Persecuted.

Vedrines, I may tell you, brought back more than order Frenchmen who were suffering particularly from Hun oppression were mysteriously spirited away from German domination. The daring Vedrines was often responsible for this.

If he had no spy to bring back, he gladly took aboard a persecuted citizen of his beloved country, and delivered him from the tyranny of the invader. Not a few escaped in this fashion, and will live to bless the dashing airman to their dying day.

For these daring exploits Vedrines was awarded the Military Medal and the Legion of Honor—the highest awards any soldier of France can be given.

Vedrines, who was born in 1881 at St. Denis, began life as a telegraph boy, and from this "humble position," as he styled it himself, rose to one of the most brilliant aviators the world has produced. His war work over, Vedrines again gave rein to his competitive instinct in flying. He always wanted to lead in aviation.

In January he succeeded in effecting a landing on the terrace of the Galleries Lafayette at Paris. There was a thick fog when Vedrines started but he flew over the Grand Boulevards, and then shut off his engine. Flying at the height of a few feet only above the balustrade surrounding the terrace of the big emporium, Vedrines landed safely on the terrace, although his machine, owing to the speed at which he was flying, was damaged.

A Recent Achievement.

He thus won the prize of 35,000 francs offered to the first airman to land on a roof. The terrace was only 14 metres (56 feet) in width, and Vedrines machine had a span of 12 metres.

He immediately announced his intention of attempting the flight from Paris to Rome, which has eneded so disastrously, after which he was to prepare for a flight round the world.

Vedrines had many hairbreadth escapes. In June, 1911, in the Paris-Turin contest, his machine turned turtle, but he escaped unhurt. Then in the following August he fell into the sea at Trouville, escaping with a few scratches. On April 29, 1912, Vedrines met with a very serious accident while attempting a flight from Douai to Madrid between Pierrefette and St. Denis something went wrong with his motor, and he was forced to descend from a height of 600 feet. The machine was caught by a gust of wind, and fell with a crash on the railway line. A train which happened to be passing was pulled up in time, and the injured airman was at once removed to Paris, where he underwent the operation for trepanning, subsequently making a remarkable recovery.

At the time of his death Vedrines was engaged in perfecting plans about which nothing absolutely had been published. He was working in particular on a winged machine with neither engine nor propellor. It was always one of his pet theories and schemes, and had he lived he would, I know from what he has told me casually on many an occasion, have revolutionized flying. His whole mind and all his energies were devoted to his work. By his death France loses a gallant son and soldier—the world one of the master minds in aviation—and those who were priveleged to know him a cheery, companionable friend.

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Notice is hereby given that all of the stock and fixtures, together with the good will of said business, now contained in the store known and designated as No. 1216 Stratford avenue, Bridgeport, Connecticut, belonging to the plumbing business formerly conducted by George Hebermehl, deceased, will be sold at public auction on the 23rd day of May, 1919, at 3 p. m.
MARIE A. HEBERMEHL, Executrix, of the estate of George Hebermehl.
Thomas C. Coughlin, Attorney at Law, 1188 Main St., Bridgeport, Conn.
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